

Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office



Lakewood: Pam Sponholtz, Project Leader

US Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs: Brian Mihlbachler, Biological Scientist, Diane Strohm, Biological Scientist, Greg Speights, Biological Technician, Steve Wallace, Forestry Technician

Buckley Air Force Base, Aurora: Krystal Phillips, Fish and Wildlife Biologist

US Army Pueblo Chemical Depot, Pueblo: Max Canestorp, Natural and Cultural Resources Manager

Rocky Mountain National Park, Estes Park: Chris Kennedy, Fish Biologist

Warren Air Force Base, Cheyenne, WY: Timothy Grosch, Fish and Wildlife Biologist

October 2013 Accomplishment Report

Leadership in Science and Technology

Fire Hazard Workshop: Steve Wallace and Diane Strohm attended a two-day "Assessing Wildfire Hazards in the Home Ignition Zone" workshop. Steve and Diane have completed defensible space treatments around several buildings in the past, including most recently in proximity to the historic Scout Hut buildings. An extensive survey is needed to evaluate fuel hazard mitigation needs around homes and other infrastructure on base. Steve and Diane plan to work closely with U.S. Air Force Academy (Academy) Fire on this inventory, beginning within the next few months.



Home in Upper Douglass Valley Housing in need of defensible space clearing

Flooding Assistance: Pam Sponholtz and Scott Roth (National Fish Passage Coordinator for Region 6) participated in several conference calls regarding the recent flooding in Colorado. Both Pam and Scott described the technical expertise that the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) could bring and our willingness to partner with other agencies to make funding go farther.

Partnerships and Accountability

Annual Safety Inspection: Steve Wallace compiled the Natural Resources Station Safety Plan and other documents in support of the annual USFWS safety inspection.

New Air Force bases in Region 6: Pam Sponholtz submitted comments on several scopes of work that cover natural resource activities on several bases in Region 6. These documents will provide the basis for conducting natural resource management on these bases.

Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan (INRMP): The Sikes Act requires each installation to meet annually with USFWS and State Wildlife Agency to review the INRMP. Krystal Phillips facilitated and accomplished the tri-party meeting to annually review the Buckley Air Force Base (BAFB) INRMP.

Stormwater management in the Fountain Creek Watershed: Brian Mihlbachler attended several Pikes Peak Regional Stormwater Task Force meetings and local government forums to discuss stormwater management in the Fountain Creek Watershed. A study sponsored by the City of Colorado Springs recently validated and prioritized \$535M in projects to address current stormwater concerns, but this does not include costs for O&M, post-fire stormwater damage, or post-flooding damage from the heavy September rain in El Paso County. The County is conducting a similar stormwater project validation and prioritization, with a final report due in late-November.

Upper Monument Creek (UMC) Landscape

Restoration Initiative: Diane Strohm continued to participate in the UMC planning process, preparing maps and reviewing and providing input on the draft report. This multi-agency planning initiative is expected to be complete by early winter.

Integrated Natural Resource Management Policy

Revision: Diane Strohm and Brian Mihlbachler reviewed and submitted comments on a revision an Air Force publication outlines natural resource management for all facets of natural resource management across USAF installations.

Site tour: Max Canestorp provided a tour of Pueblo Chemical Depot's (PCD) western boundary to the new installation Commander.

Insect and Disease Suppression Funding Proposal:

Diane Strohm prepared the Academy's FY14 proposal to the USFS for insect and disease projects, with emphasis on bark beetle and dwarf mistletoe management. The USFS hosts this program to provide funding to federal installations for forest insect and disease management. It will review and prioritizes proposals, with funding decisions made later this winter. The Academy has received approximately \$50K annually over the past five years.

Wildland Fire Management Plan (WFMP): The Buckley Air Force Base (BAFB) WFMP is presently in draft version and is outlined in the FY14 Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan (INRMP) work plans to be finalized by the installation. Krystal Phillips coordinated efforts to have the 460th Space Wing Fire Department leadership review and provide functional level comments/ recommendations on the draft WFMP to begin the Air Force level formal finalization process.

Landline Survey with Bureau of Land Management

(BLM) Survey Crew: Diane Strohm continues to coordinate with the BLM on a project to survey the south, west and north boundaries of the Academy. Fieldwork is approximately 50% complete, with final survey plats and reports due this winter.

Wildlife Management Plan (WMP): The Buckley Air Force Base (BAFB) WMP is a component plan of the Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan (INRMP) and the revised WMP was an open Bird Airstrike Hazard (BASH) audit item which needed to be closed. During the month of October, the BAFB installation commander finalized the WMP. Krystal Phillips provided final copies of the plan to internal and external stakeholders.

Species Conservation and Management

Assessment of the U.S. Air Force Academy airfield:

Brian Mihlbachler participated in the annual certification of the Academy airfield, which include an assessment of potential wildlife-aircraft strike hazards, rodent activity (pocket gophers), airfield mowing requirements, and bare ground revegetation. The airfield has seen an increase in migrant birds and bird-aircraft strikes (e.g., kestrel, horned lark, vesper sparrow), but no significant aircraft damage has been reported.

Discouraging bear interactions: Brian Mihlbachler worked with the Academy Civil Engineering to weld a sturdy metal plate on the Community Center trash compactor to prevent bears and other wildlife from accessing the garbage and being attracted to this busy public area.



Metal plate welded on the Commissary trash compactor to prevent bears and other wildlife from accessing the garbage

Saratoga, WY National Fish Hatchery: The Saratoga hatchery is to provide four million Lewis Lake trout eggs to the Great Lakes restoration effort, and to provide 3.5 million Plymouth Rock brown trout eggs to other Federal, state and tribal programs. During a three day site visit Krystal Phillips assisted hatchery staff with removing brown and lake trout eggs from females in an effort to become more familiar with hatchery operations.

Rabbit Carcass Donation: Buckley Air Force Base (BAFB) Pest Management Shop routinely sets traps to humanely remove cottontail rabbits, considered a nuisance species and outlined as such in the Integrated Pest Management Plan. The carcasses are frozen and donated to the Birds of Prey Foundation in Broomfield, CO, to be fed to injured and orphaned raptors in the process of being rehabilitated for release into the wild. In an effort to conserve wildlife resources, Krystal Phillips routinely coordinates and transports the carcasses to the facility. During October, 133 carcasses were donated to the facility.

Replacing water temperature loggers: Chris Kennedy replaced water temperature loggers from Fern Lake, Fern Creek, Spruce Lake, upper Hidden Valley Creek, lower Hidden Valley Creek and Ouzel Creek within Rocky Mountain National Park. The temperature data is used to assess the thermal character of these areas as it pertains to cutthroat trout recruitment.

Data entry for native cutthroat trout project: Chris Kennedy entered information that was collected from Paradise Creek and Boundary Lake within Rocky Mountain National Park during the 2013 field season. These data were collected as part of a project to assess the potential for restoration of native cutthroat trout. Data collected include: pH readings, water flows, mapping of backwaters, location of macroinvertebrate collections, lake depth readings, extent of fish, locations of fish migration barriers, time of water travel, fish survey locations, and locations of temperature loggers. Data will be used to generate maps and a report on all information collected so that a chemical treatment plan can be developed if it is decided to go forward with a restoration project.

Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) Resources Management: Chris Kennedy and Pam Sponholtz participated in coordination meeting with members of the RMNP Resources Management staff to discuss projects for the 2014 field season and desired products to be completed during the fall/winter. A list of desired projects for the field season were compiled from which a schedule will be developed.

Proposed bird monitoring inventories: Max Canestorp submitted a letter of support to a funding source for a proposed Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory bird monitoring project on military installations.

Burrowing owl survey report: Max Canestorp completed the 2013 survey report for burrowing owls on Buckley Air Force Base (BAFB). Only one nesting pair of burrowing owls was found on BAFB in 2013.

Habitat Conservation and Management

Farish Forest Health Concerns: Diane Strohm performed a field assessment of dead and dying trees in the Farish Recreation Area on the Academy. Predominant species include aspen, which is short-lived and prone to numerous insects and diseases; and Engelmann spruce, which is being decimated by the spruce beetle in other parts of Colorado. A minor amount of spruce beetle was found. Plans are being for a subsequent field visit with a U.S. Forest Service (USFS) entomologist. An extensive survey will be completed and dead and dying trees removed before the recreation area opens again in the spring.



Engelmann spruce at Farish killed by spruce beetle (*Dendroctonus rufipennis*)



Pitch tubes indicating beetle attack

Bark Beetles: Steve Wallace continues to focus on field surveys to locate beetle-infested trees on the Academy. These are immediately cut and chipped or de-barked by contractors to minimize insect spread. His work has significantly decreased potential tree mortality from the Ips beetle, whose four to five annual generations necessitate prompt attention.

Demolition of multiple homes in the Pine Valley housing area: Brian Mihlbachler reviewed site restoration plans for the demolition of multiple homes in the Pine Valley housing area on the Academy. Removal of the units near West Monument Creek will allow for native revegetation of upland areas that may eventually be suitable habitat for the Preble's meadow jumping mouse.

Erosion control and site revegetation: Brian Mihlbachler coordinated with project engineers to develop a design and specifications for erosion control and site revegetation in the Community Center area on the Academy.

Wildlife-friendly security fence: Brian Mihlbachler provided direction on the placement of a wildlife-friendly security fence from Northgate to the north base boundary. The fence alignment was routed outside the El Paso County trail easement and kept out of the Preble's meadow jumping mouse riparian habitat on Black Forest Creek.

Soil and Vegetative Phase I Project: Most of the soil and vegetation occurring within unimproved areas on Buckley Air Force Base (BAFB) has been disturbed, the focus of this project will make site-specific recommendations, synthesize literature, and answer questions regarding native short grass prairie seed mixes, soil amendments, and best practices to stimulate native vegetative growth and maintenance. Krystal Phillips reviewed the draft report provided by Dr. Calvin Pearson and made suggestions for the final report. This report will be used to develop and execute a Phase II project on BAFB in include the possibility of site specific vegetative test plots.

Goose nest basket removal: Max Canestorp removed three goose nest baskets from the Lynda Ann Reservoir area on PCD. Due to the proximity of

Pueblo Airport, it was determined that providing nesting opportunities for geese presented the appearance of increasing the potential for Bird Airstrike Hazard (BASH) issues.

Public Use and Recreation

Flood debris removal: Greg Speights removed flood debris from several wooden footbridge crossings on the Falcon Trail and rebuilt damaged sections of trail leading up to the bridges.

Falcon Trail: Greg Speights and Brian Mihlbachler have been assessing Falcon Trail re-route options that could be implemented to improve overall trail sustainability and reduce annual maintenance needs.



Repaired footbridge crossing on the Falcon Trail

Deer and elk herds: Greg Speights and Brian Mihlbachler spent time scouting the deer and elk herds in preparation for the fall/winter hunts on the Academy.

Cultural Resources

Cultural Artifacts on BAFB: Any artifacts found on military lands must be housed in a facility which meets federal compliance standards. Krystal Phillips facilitated the transport of Buckley Air Force Base (BAFB) artifacts to FE Warren Air Force Base, WY, in an effort to prevent future AF costs for storing the artifacts and meet federal curation compliance standards.

Edited by: Emily R. Fausch